

ARIZONA'S ABANDONED & INACTIVE MINE PROGRAM

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Abstract

In the spring of 1992, the Arizona State Mine Inspector (ASMI) entered into an agreement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to survey federally-managed lands and inventory abandoned and inactive mines. To fulfill the terms of this agreement, the Mine Inspector established a student intern program. Students from colleges and universities across the state have participated in the program, conducting field investigations and writing reports. For the first five years the program was run only under this agreement to work on federal lands managed by the BLM. In 1997 the State Legislature approved funding to begin the same program on state-managed lands and the creation of three permanent staff positions. In addition, the legislature appropriated thirty thousand dollars to safeguard the public by erecting fences or other barricades around abandoned mines on state managed lands.

In early 1998 then State Senator Rusty Bowers introduced the Abandoned Mines Safety Fund as Senate Bill 1250. The objectives of the Safety Fund were to encourage private contributions that could be used directly to abate public safety risks on State Lands and leverage legislative appropriations to increase funding for this work. Money placed in the fund was limited to covering the direct cost of work and could be used to cover administrative costs. The bill passed through the Senate and the House, and in a formal ceremony in September 1998, Governor Hull signed the bill into law, formally initiating the Abandoned Mine Safety Fund. In February 1999 a site in Cave Creek became the first site backfilled under this program. To date \$110,000 has been donated or appropriated to the fund and nearly 100 mine openings have been safe-guarded by fencing, gating or backfilling.

In 1996, the ASMI finalized an agreement with the National Park Service (NPS) to assist in closures of abandoned mines in national parks, monuments, and recreational areas throughout the state. As part of this agreement, ASMI would contract local companies to conduct the required mine closures at selected parks. The first large project was a large fencing project at Katherine Mine near Bullhead City. In 2001 the tailings impoundment at Katherine Mine was fenced with chain-link fencing to keep the public from accessing the dangerous and unstable canyons cut through the tailings by flood waters. In addition a large and unstable shaft and stope area was fenced to protect visitors from a collapse structure near the Katherine Mill. Currently no other projects are planned.

In 2002 large state deficits caused the severe reduction or elimination of several state programs, including the abandoned mines program. Seventy-five percent of the program staff was cut and state appropriations to the Abandoned Mine Safety Fund were curtailed. Currently the program does not actively inventory abandoned mines sites but does respond to abandoned mine complaints. Public information and warning signs are available by request. More information about the Arizona State Mine Inspector's Office can be found at www.asmi.state.az.us.